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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between September 2001 and September 2002. It reviews the effects on the situation of women of Israeli settlements and movement restrictions and closures, as well as the effects of the unfolding humanitarian crisis. The report provides an overview of the assistance provided to Palestinian women by entities of the United Nations system, in particular with regard to economic activities, humanitarian assistance, education and training, health, the human rights of women and the media. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2002/25 of 24 July 2002 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed concern about the continuing dangerous deterioration of the situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-seventh session a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report, which covers the period from September 2001 to September 2002, assesses the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the United Nations Human Rights Inquiry Commission, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Despite occasional references to the situation of women, the reports of these bodies and individuals rarely provided in-depth analysis of the specific situation of women within the overall population during the reporting period. Two recent studies, focusing on the situation of women, were also consulted in the preparation of the report.[1]

3. The report further reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Bank.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

4. In the period under review, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including major towns such as Jenin, Ramallah, Nablus and Bethlehem, was characterized by continued violence, which left hundreds of civilians dead and thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, wounded (A/57/63-E/2002/21, para. 4; see A/ES-10/186, sect. III). Between 28 September 2000 and 31 January 2002, the records of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East indicate that an estimated 558 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, and an estimated 364 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip (A/57/63-E/2002/21, para. 4). Women have been injured near or inside their

homes or when attempting to cross checkpoints. They have also assumed the major responsibility as caregivers to the injured.

5. In May 2002, the Security Council held an Arria Formula meeting with two women, one Israeli and one Palestinian. The closed meeting provided an opportunity for the members of the Security Council to hear the views of women from the region, including on the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all conflict resolution efforts in the region.

Israeli settlements

6. The expansion of the Israeli settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the destruction of land and the building of bypass roads in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to create difficulties for the Palestinians.[2] In the Gaza Strip over 400 houses were completely destroyed and 200 seriously damaged, leaving over 5,000 persons homeless (E/CN.4/2002/32, para. 29). Women are affected by house demolitions that usually render whole families homeless, with little or no means to rebuild their homes. Carried out without prior notice, families usually find themselves without clothes, food, furniture or other basic necessities, increasing the hardship for women who carry household responsibilities.[3]

Movement restrictions and closures

7. Movement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been severely restricted (E/CN.4/2002/32, para. 33), with Palestinians being subject to a variety of internal and external closures, curfews, roadblocks and restrictions that prevent or seriously inhibit movement and generally keep people confined to their villages or cities and often to their homes for extended periods, making it extremely difficult for the great majority of civilians, including women, to sustain their livelihoods.[4]

The unfolding humanitarian crisis

8. On 7 August 2002, the Secretary-General appointed Catherine Bertini as his Personal Humanitarian Envoy, who travelled to the region (11-19 August) to assess the nature and scale of the humanitarian crisis, review humanitarian needs and propose recommendations for action. The mission concluded that there was a serious humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, inextricably linked to the ongoing conflict, and characterized it as a crisis of access and mobility.[5] During her mission, the Envoy also met with women's groups.

9. As a consequence of the restrictions on movement, normal economic activity, movement of persons and goods, and access to basic services throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been paralysed, with devastating effects on the Palestinian economy (A/ES-10/186, para. 37 [d]) and sharp declines in all sectors, especially in agriculture, industry, commerce and tourism. Daily Palestinian income losses have been estimated at some $7.6 million. Since the start of the current intifada, overall income losses have been estimated at $3.3 billion.[6]

10. The severe economic depression in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has led to an increase in poverty, including among women. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator estimates that the 60 per cent poverty rate has already been reached, with levels at approximately 55 per cent in the West Bank and 70 per cent in the Gaza Strip. Total economic breakdown has been prevented only with continued injections of budgetary support from international donors. Donor aid, currently at $900 million United States dollars (US$) annually, cannot come close to covering the cumulative losses.[7]

11. Lack of domestic economic activity has led to an almost 20 per cent contraction in employment,[8] raising the unemployment rate from 11 per cent in the third quarter of 2000 to 78 per cent in the second quarter of 2002.[9] This decline has also affected women's labour force participation, which has remained persistently low. Women have been severely affected by the decline in the agriculture sector as they play a major role in agriculture production for the household economy, and loss of land, or of access to land, deprives them of a vital source of income for the household. The decline in agricultural activities not only greatly increases the burden on women to provide for their families, but also negatively affects their status within the household and society.[10]

12. Access to water has been greatly affected by closures owing to obstacles placed in the way of water lorries, the destruction of wells, rooftop water tanks and rain collection pools by shelling, the damaging of water resources by settlers and soldiers and the high consumption of water by settlers (E/CN.4/2002/32, para. 36). The plight of some 200,000 Palestinians who do not have access to a water network and rely mostly on rainfall remains especially difficult. Water costs have tripled in some areas, making it more difficult for families to meet their basic domestic and vital needs. Some of the population reportedly went into debt to purchase water, while others cut consumption or used unclean supplies.[11] The water used is of extremely poor quality and has a detrimental effect on people's health, in particular on the most vulnerable population groups — children, women and the elderly.[12]

13. The ongoing conflict has affected the nutritional and health status of women and children. A recent study funded by the United States Agency for International Development[13] found widespread malnutrition, in particular among children and women of childbearing age, with a significant proportion of chronically malnourished children. Children's levels of moderate and severe malnourishment were found to be at 13.2 per cent for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip combined, with rates in the Gaza Strip five times those of the West Bank (17.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent, respectively). The study also found that women in the Gaza Strip showed a tendency towards a greater prevalence of anaemia, which can lead to low birth-weight infants and premature delivery among pregnant women. A market survey within the study found that market disruptions from curfews, closures, military incursions, border closures and checkpoints affected access to key high protein foods, especially meat and poultry and dairy products, and in particular, infant formula and powdered milk. It also found that a significant portion of the population could not afford high protein foods, and nearly a third had difficulty affording basic inexpensive staples such as bread and rice.

14. According to the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the adverse impact of closures and prolonged curfews on

Palestinian villages and towns severely restricted the access of civilians, especially women, to life-saving services such as emergency obstetric care (see A/57/207). Indicators of a breakdown in preventive services in the West Bank, in particular, include an increase in stillbirths and low birth-weight rates, late registration and irregular attendance of pregnant women for antenatal care (see A/57/63-E/2002/21). According to witnesses, the current crisis has adversely affected not only Palestinians' general physical health and health-care facilities, but also their psychosocial well-being. Trauma and stress have already become a serious health problem, especially for women and young people (see A/57/207).

15. The human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has also deteriorated seriously, with severe violations of the human rights of the Palestinian civilian population and a rapid escalation of violence in the region. A report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (A/57/63-E/2002/21) described the serious gender impacts of the crisis and reported that incidences of gender-based violence within families had been multiplying. The report also stated that the destruction of homes and the death of male heads of household, coupled with men's frustration owing to unemployment and immobility, have resulted in a sharp increase in incest and domestic violence. According to a UNIFEM study,[14] Palestinian women have been subjected to various violations of their human rights including forced displacement, loss of employment and lack of health services. It reported that over the years many women had been arrested for political reasons, held in solitary confinement, forced to give birth in their prison cells, tortured, verbally and sexually threatened, and abused.

16. Education at all levels has suffered seriously since the beginning of the crisis. Some schools have been used by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as military outposts; others have been bombed; over a hundred have come under fire, both in the daytime when the schools are in session and at night. School attendance has been hampered by checkpoints, which prevent both pupils and teachers from reaching school on time, and by military curfews. Schools have lost considerable teaching time as a result of interruption and closures; absenteeism is rife as schools no longer provide a secure environment; and academic performance has deteriorated (E/CN.4/2002/32, para. 45).

17. Female pupils and teachers tend to be affected more gravely by the increased problems of access to education and the dangers involved in travelling to and from school, as well as the danger students and teachers are exposed to in schools. Parents have prohibited daughters from attending classes out of fear for their safety, and female pupils and teachers walk long distances in deserted areas to avoid soldiers and settlers. Female teachers are more likely to discontinue working owing to these dangers and to gender-based social perceptions that reduce the woman's role in public life.[15]

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

18. While the current situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has made it difficult for international organizations to provide direct assistance to Palestinian women, the organizations of the United Nations system have continued to respond to their needs.

Economic activities

19. In its Medium-Term Plan for 2002-2005 and its current programme of work and priorities for 2002-2003, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has given special attention to the socio-economic situation of Palestinian people in general and to Palestinian women in particular. In collaboration with the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in Damascus, ESCWA is also executing a project to provide gender-sensitive socio-economic data on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 60 per cent of whom are women.

20. The United Nations Development Programme has continued to provide support and services to women-owned household economy projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. One project aims to create opportunities for women to establish new, or rehabilitate and maintain existing, household economy activities to increase their production and sales volume and improve their financial and technical capacities. The ultimate objective of the project is to secure additional income for poor families, especially in the existing situation, with efforts directed at the poorest areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. So far, two Palestinian non-governmental organizations have been contracted to implement such projects in the West Bank. UNDP also supported the establishment of a women's design centre in Bethlehem, which aims to increase the income of rural and urban artisan women and contribute to their sustainable livelihood by promoting Palestinian handicrafts in local and international markets.

21. The United Nations Development Fund for Women launched and continues to support a regional resource network of women's small and microenterprises in the Gaza Strip as well as in Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The aim of the project is to increase women's access to and control over economic resources by upgrading their technical and financial business management skills. The network also aims to strengthen the outreach and sustainability of gender-sensitive small and medium-sized enterprise development programmes, and it promotes cooperation between such institutions.

22. During the period 2001/2002 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East delivered economic assistance to Palestinian refugees through the provision of credit to microentrepreneurs. UNRWA's microfinance and microenterprise programme granted 2,893 loans to women, valued at $1.36 million. Until the onset of the economic crisis resulting from the closures and restrictions on movement of Palestinian labour and commodities beginning in October 2000, the programme had been fully self-sufficient, covering its costs from credit operations. In 2001, the programme's rate of self-sufficiency fell to 89 per cent as expenditures outstripped income, with declining repayment rates and a reduction in loan size brought about by the closures and economic decline. As a result of the current crisis, the annual repayment rate for the product fell from 97 per cent in 1999 to 91 per cent in 2001 and to 83 per cent in the first half of 2002. However, despite the loss in portfolio efficiency and quality, the women's credit product continued to perform adequately in the face of the enormous pressures facing the business community, and it remains one of the only sources of credit for women microentrepreneurs.

23. From July 2001 to June 2002, UNRWA assisted approximately 6 per cent of its poorest registered refugees (special hardship case families). Out of a total population of almost 4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA, 43 to 52 per cent, depending on the field of operation, are families headed by women. The Agency's special hardship assistance provided those families with a critical safety net in the form of food support and selective cash assistance. The Agency also promoted community participation by and community services for Palestinian refugee women through 70 women's programme centres, which included occupational training programmes, kindergartens and nurseries. A total of 40,240 participants, mainly women and children, benefited from these services. Furthermore, the Agency promoted the self-reliance of Palestinian refugee women through its poverty alleviation programme, which issued $81,750 in small loans during the period under review to more than 70 women and through the solidarity group lending product, which assisted 261 women's support groups with a total of $371,186. Other self-support programmes, which provided part-grant, part-loan financing to help special hardship case families generate income, benefited more than 25 women and their families, with a total amount of $59,265.

24. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization established an integrated support programme to Palestinian industry with a focus on industrial upgrading. The programme is comprised of two major components: (a) building capacity of the Ministry of Industry; and (b) building capacity of the private sector with five subcomponents respectively. While the programme does not have a specific component of assistance to Palestinian women, during the period under review, women were trained in quality management and enterprise upgrading. Women also participated in the training on UNIDO business performance software, and received training in Quality and Enterprise Diagnostic.

25. The ILO Regional Office for Arab States has undertaken activities to provide assistance to Palestinian women. An interregional programme on capacity-building for gender equality, employment promotion and poverty eradication in selected countries of Western Asia and North Africa and in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is currently under implementation. The main objectives of the programme are to enhance capacities at local, national and regional levels to address the linkages between gender, poverty and employment, and to develop and implement anti-poverty employment policies and programmes that contribute to gender equality. The International Labour Organization has also developed several projects aimed at strengthening the national capacity for promoting women's security and employability in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and at strengthening women's participation in Palestinian trade unions. The ILO also reported that disruption created by the crisis made it impossible to implement the action plan for gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Labour that it had developed in 2000.

26. In response to the emergency needs, the World Bank manages a total of over $25 million bilateral donor funds destined for job-creation projects. One of the main selection criteria is a project's ability to benefit women directly. The West Bank and Gaza: second community development project, funded by the World Bank, identifies the need to integrate criteria such as inclusion of women, youth and the poor in social appraisals. Targeted interventions, such as promoting kindergartens and training centres for women, will benefit women directly. Under this project, a series of meetings attended only by women enabled them to voice their opinion on the design and implementation of different project components.

27. The World Bank is also implementing its emergency services support project, approved by the Bank's Executive Directors in February 2002, which aims to mitigate the deterioration of basic social and municipal services brought about by the ongoing conflict and its negative effects on economic activity and revenue. The project will, among other things, improve the availability of basic services in the health sector, sustain municipal waste management and secure essential school supplies. Through its country office in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the World Bank, with other donors, is also an active participant in the gender task force.

Humanitarian assistance

28. At the beginning of 2002, the World Food Programme was providing assistance to some 371,000 non-refugee vulnerable Palestinians who had no reliable source of income. To respond to the increased food aid requirements of the non-refugee population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the World Food Programme merged its ongoing emergency and protracted relief and recovery operations into a new and bigger emergency operation, which was approved jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in May 2002, at a total cost to the World Food Programme of $18.3 million.

29. Women remain the primary recipients of World Food Programme food aid in the Palestinian territories, constituting about 60 per cent of the food aid beneficiaries of WFP's emergency operation, and food aid is used as a means to reinforce the woman's role as a decision maker in society. Around 900 women participated in committees managing food aid at the municipal and village levels. In September 2000, the chairperson of the inter-ministerial relief committee, who was also the Minister of Social Affairs, was a woman, as were 60 per cent of the social workers in the Ministry of Social Affairs. The strong presence of women in social institutions and their active involvement in welfare work ensured that women's needs as beneficiaries and participants were considered.

30. To the greatest extent possible, considering distances to distribution centres and security conditions, the World Food Programme makes all efforts with its partners to distribute the food rations directly to the adult women of registered families. This is considered a tool to strengthen the woman's role within the family. About 55 per cent of food aid recipients at distribution sites were women. Women were encouraged to participate actively in food-for-work schemes that included rehabilitation of agricultural land in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, rehabilitation of water cisterns and rehabilitation of home gardens. Training activities were organized on topics such as food processing, food security, first aid and literacy, where the women who attended received in exchange a monthly ration of food for their families. About half of the persons living in hospitals and charitable institutions who received WFP food aid were women and girls.

31. Until December 2002, the World Food Programme planned to provide food aid to half a million food insecure poor and destitute persons who were either not able to work even if employment were available (among them many female heads of households, disabled or elderly people) or who had been unemployed for over one year. The plan also included some 10,000 people in hospitals and social institutions.

Education and training

32. The education programme of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continued to be one of the primary means by which the Agency promoted the human resource development of female Palestinian refugees. In the 2001/2002 academic year, 486,026 pupils were enrolled in UNRWA elementary, preparatory and secondary schools, of whom 243,259, or 50 per cent, were female. Of the Agency's 16,168 teachers, 48 per cent were female. Palestinian refugee women accounted for 72 per cent of the participants in UNRWA's pre and in-service teacher training courses and for 64 per cent of its trainees in technical and semi-professional courses. Of the 197 continuing UNRWA scholarships in 2001/2002, 46 per cent were held by women. In addition, during 2001/2002, 58 Palestinian women in Lebanon benefited from a scholarship project addressed to women only and managed by UNRWA on behalf of a donor country. A separate scholarship programme, administered with the support of two international non-governmental organizations and the Cisco Learning Institute, provided training scholarships to 60 disadvantaged Palestine refugees from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Of those, 75 per cent were given to female refugees.

33. The Department of Education of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made special efforts to help Palestinian refugee women acquire modern technological skills through a gender-specific project in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The project emphasized equal access to information and communication technologies by Palestine refugee women and men, encouraged gender balance in recruitment and retention policies, built capacity to produce appropriate information content for Palestine refugee women and helped them to fulfil their socio-economic, reproductive and community participation roles. In a further effort to improve the human resources of Palestine refugee women, in 2001 UNRWA revised the admissions policy at its Education Science Faculty in Jordan, which offered pre-service teacher training leading to a first-level university degree, by assigning 50 per cent of the places to qualified Palestinian refugee women in order to promote gender balance in the faculty. UNRWA also sought to promote the human resource capacities of Palestinian refugee women through its recruitment policy. Women occupy 55.5 per cent of senior managerial posts in the UNRWA/UNESCO Department of Education.

34. The United Nations Children's Fund supported the Ministry of Education in the back-to-school campaign, aimed at maintaining high enrolment rates despite economic and mobility difficulties. A media campaign to encourage children to return to and stay in school was conducted, and schools are being supported by UNICEF to provide assistance to 14,000 Palestinian children in need. UNICEF support also reached a considerable number of Palestinian refugee women in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, through a variety of activities. These included training of pre-school teachers, adult literacy sessions, administrative and computer skills training courses, and vocational training for women, including management of small businesses. UNICEF also supported income-generating projects, health education, basic health and first aid concepts, nutrition and early child development, including the detection and prevention of child abuse, and the

training of health workers to educate mothers, provide antenatal care and promote breastfeeding.

35. The International Labour Organization faced difficulties in administering training courses. Owing to internal travel restrictions and border closures, Palestinian participants, including women, were unable to attend annual Arabic language courses undertaken in collaboration with the Arab States programme at the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin. They were also unable to attend courses on women workers' rights, equality in employment and family responsibilities.

Health

36. In order to promote the health status of Palestinian refugee women, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East provided maternal and child health care and family planning services as an integral part of its primary health care. During 2001, more than 76,000 women received antenatal care in the Agency's five fields of operation, representing approximately 59 per cent of all expected deliveries among registered refugees. Approximately 20,800 new family-planning acceptors were enrolled in the programme and the total number of continuing users exceeded 87,000.

37. UNRWA sustained full immunization coverage of women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases, supported by school health services and iron supplementation for women throughout pregnancy and post delivery as well as by health education programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, which were implemented as multisectoral activities targeting schoolchildren and women. Great attention was paid to improving the access of women to quality care, health information and services. Within the context of its family planning services, the health programme addressed such issues as early childbearing and its consequences for the health of women and children as a matter of high priority. The health programme sought to strengthen its gender-sensitive programming by obtaining, whenever possible, sex-disaggregated data, with the objective of reducing gender-based health disparities.

38. The United Nations Children's Fund continued to facilitate Ministry of Health access to remote and closed areas by making available international staff and a United Nations vehicle, thereby sustaining routine vaccination services in the West Bank. Technical support was given to the Ministry of Health to expand immunization, monitor maternal and child health programmes, and train health workers. UNICEF also assisted in the procurement of vaccines and essential medicines on behalf of the United States Agency for International Development. In response to the growing concern for the nutrition of women and children in the occupied Palestinian territories, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health's efforts to enhance the capacity of maternal and child health workers in the following areas: providing appropriate child feeding, growth monitoring, advice and referral; coordinating with all key stakeholders to ensure the fortification of flour supplies with iron; proposing more efficient iron and folic acid supplementation programmes; increasing awareness-raising activities on the importance of breastfeeding; and expanding public education programmes, including public health announcements on television.

39. The United Nations Children's Fund supported a women's health project in which the obstetrics and neonatal units of two hospitals in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were upgraded with the provision of equipment and support for staff training in quality essential obstetric and neonatal care. To strengthen the maternal care monitoring system, UNICEF supported the updating and printing of registry books for high-risk pregnancy and maternal and child health, in addition to the completion of a verbal autopsy of all deaths of women of reproductive age as part of a national survey on maternal mortality. UNICEF supported psychosocial interventions at the national and district levels conducted by the Palestinian Authority and non-governmental organizations, including the training of social workers to improve their skills; the provision of psychosocial information and services to families; awareness-raising through television spots and brochures for parents; and the delivery of family kits. UNICEF initiated or supported psychosocial coordination and planning in Jenin, Jericho, Tulkarem and the five districts of the Gaza Strip, and continued to chair the United Nations psychosocial coordination group.

40. The outcomes of various nutrition studies by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and its own recent field mission to Jerusalem reinforced that agency's determination to pursue its initiatives to provide assistance for policy formulation and strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, and to support the field activities of the numerous local non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and other international stakeholders.

Women's human rights, including violence against women

41. Under a technical assistance project, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights funded the women's unit of a non-governmental organization dealing with human rights. The United Nations Development Fund for Women supported the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to develop strategies to aid disclosure and promote greater awareness within the criminal justice system of crimes of violence committed against women. The project has trained judges on the legal aspects of sexual abuse and provided information on such cases to promote greater public awareness on the issue. Through the Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women, UNIFEM supports a project to empower Palestinian women to confront and protect themselves against violent behaviour.

Media

42. The Department of Public Information held its annual training programme for Palestinian media practitioners from October to December 2001, in which nine Palestinian broadcasters and journalists, including four women, participated. United Nations radio produced an English magazine entitled "Israeli and Palestinian women offer a model of cooperation" which focused on the Security Council meeting held in May 2002 during which Israeli and Palestinian women were invited to share their views on the conflict in the Middle East. The Middle East Radio Unit produced five features on Palestinian women, including their activities in a non-governmental organization conference held concurrently with the World Conference against

Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa in 2001, and their role in helping children to cope with violence. During the reporting period, the Department of Public Information interviewed a number of prominent Palestinian women.

43. The United Nations Development Fund for Women supports a project to strengthen strategic partnerships between media and women's organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Through the initiative, a media and women leaders network has been established, and local media and women's organizations have been trained in gender-sensitive reporting and campaigning.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

44. The situation of Palestinian women is inextricably linked to overall developments in the region and to progress in the peace process. There are, however, important and significant differences in how women and men respectively are affected by the socio-economic and political situation. These effects are apparent in such areas as basic social services, including education and health, economic opportunities and means of livelihood, and require particular attention in terms of data collection and analysis as well as remedial action. As the international community seeks ways to end the conflict, it is important that gender perspectives are highlighted and that women are fully involved in the conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives, as called for in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

45. While the reports by relevant bodies and individuals provided valuable information on the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in some instances also referred to the particular situation of women, further opportunities should be sought to highlight fully the specific ways in which the crisis impacts on women as compared with men so that targeted action can be taken to mitigate negative gender-specific impact. The collection of data disaggregated by sex, which is currently insufficient, and specific studies on the impact of the crisis on women in particular areas should be encouraged.

46. The entities of the United Nations system, and especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, continued to provide assistance to Palestinian women through humanitarian assistance, as well as projects to enhance women's capacity to provide for themselves and their families and to maintain women's access to education and health. United Nations entities, however, also encountered difficulties in their work as a result of the crisis.

47. Continuing support by the entities of the United Nations system is critical for the benefit of Palestinian women in the occupied territories and refugee camps. As the conflict exacerbates existing hardships and creates new difficulties, continued assistance should focus in particular on such areas as women's employment and economic empowerment, education, health, social welfare and violence against women. Further efforts should be undertaken to explicitly identify and address gender perspectives in all international assistance programmes, in addition to implementing projects specifically targeted to women.

Notes

[1] Eileen Kuttab and Riham Bargouti, "Impact of armed conflict on Palestinian women", study prepared for the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (2002); and Johns Hopkins University and Al-Quds University, "Preliminary findings of the nutritional assessment and sentinel surveillance system for West Bank and Gaza" (Global Management Consulting Group; Brussels, Care International; and Washington, D.C., United States Agency for International Development, 2002). Available from http://www.usaid.gov/wbg/reports_1.htm.

[2] Office of the United Special Coordinator, *The Impact of Closure and Other Mobility Restrictions on Palestinian Productive Activities, 1 January 2002-30 June 2002* (United Nations, 2002).

[3] Kuttab and Bargouti, op. cit.

[4] Kuttab and Bargouti, op. cit.; Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, *The Impact of Closure ...*; Catherine Bertini, "Mission report of the Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General, 11-19 August 2002" (United Nations, 2002), available from http://domino.un.org/bertini_rpt.htm.

[5] Bertini, ibid.

[6] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/57/35), para. 21.

[7] Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, *The Impact of Closure ...* .

[8] Ibid.

[9] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/57/35), para. 21.

[10] Kuttab and Bargouti, op. cit.

[11] Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, *The Impact of Closure ...* .

[12] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/57/35), para. 29.

[13] Johns Hopkins University and Al-Quds University, "Preliminary findings ...".

[14] Kuttab and Bargouti, op. cit.

[15] Kuttab and Bargouti, op. cit.